

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

GAINING THE EDGE:
CONNECTING WITH THE MILLENNIALS

by

Kay A. Smith, Lt Col, USAF

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Biography

Lieutenant Colonel Kay A. Smith is a student at the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama as part of the U.S. Air Force's Senior Developmental Education (SDE) program.

Prior to this, she was assigned to the United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado, as a Group Air Officer Commanding. She was responsible for motivating, training, and developing 1,100 cadets into officers of character culminating in an undergraduate degree and commission in the US Air Force.

Lieutenant Colonel Smith was commissioned from ROTC in May 1989 after graduating from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN with a math degree. She was initially a weather officer but has also worked in acquisitions, accessions training and recruiting. She has been stationed overseas in Panama fighting the war against drugs and in Germany on the Crisis Action Team during Operation ALLIED FORCE. Following that assignment, she was the operations officer at Officer Training School before attending Air Command and Staff College. After school, she was selected for command in the 367th Recruiting Squadron.

Introduction

Young Americans graduating from high schools have various options—among them are attending college, going to a trade school, or entering the workforce. Of the high school class of 2007, 67.2% of the approximately 3 million high school graduates chose to attend college-- 68.3% of the young women and 66.1% of the young men.¹ Remaining is about one million graduates annually open to exploring other avenues.

The United States Air Force (USAF) is just one of those potential employers looking for the best and brightest of the non-college bound sector to recruit into the enlisted corps. My thesis proposes implementing generational cultural training into recruiting efforts at all levels to more efficiently target our audience of qualified high school graduates ages 18-25; saving both money and time while increasing the quality of recruit. Each year the USAF dispatches 1,114 recruiters to canvass high schools, community colleges, and local events for eligible candidates at a cost of \$8,741 per recruit (for 2007).² With the exception of one year (1999) in the last thirty, the USAF has met its enlisted accession (EA) recruiting goal; proof that its tactics are sound.³

Sound and proven techniques are critical, but many times when a recruiter fails to make goal, the immediate supervisor's direction is to "make more calls" or "visit more schools"-- merely just doing more of what has already not worked for the recruiter. Given the enormous amount of talent our recruiters have, I suggest that instead of continuing to repeat the same previously unsuccessful tactics, we look at ways we can work smarter. By infusing generational

¹ US Department of Labor's Bureau and Labor Statistics. "College Enrollment and Work Activity of 2007 High School Graduates." USDL 08-0559. 25 April 2008, 1.

² Christa L. D'Andrea, Chief, Civic Affairs, to Lt Col Kay Smith, Air War College student, memorandum, 21 October 2008.

³ GAO, *Military Personnel: First Term Recruiting and Attrition Continue to Require Focused Attention*, Senate Testimony (Washington DC: GAO, 24 Feb 2000), 3.

cultural training into operations, Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) may be able to gain the edge over other employers and potentially save valuable resources while improving the quality of the enlisted airmen. Other top businesses in America have already embraced the importance of understanding generational differences and have begun training on the same. As a result, "... companies that understand the generational differences and adjust their recruitment and retention strategies accordingly are reaping bottom-line rewards in terms of an increased success rate with job candidates and higher overall job satisfaction."⁴

A pioneer in targeted recruiting, Maj Gen Max Thurman, while trying to bolster the number of women in the US Army during the 1980's, used to read Vogue and Glamour magazines and even called the President of Mary Kay cosmetics to glean advice on marketing to women.⁵ Taking what he learned, he insisted the US Army marketing agency use his data to create ads that appealed to young women's values and interests. My thesis takes his initiative targeted at women to a conceptually broader level and examines the benefits of using generational cultural training to target the values and interests of the Millennial generation.

This paper begins by looking at the enlisted accession (EA) recruiting mission, AFRS organization and the AFRS' current training programs. The major emphasis of the paper will be on generational cultural differences between the three generations present in the recruiting equation—those representing senior leaders (strategic decision makers), those of operational leaders/tactical workers (recruiting squadron leaders and grass root recruiters) and those of young Americans the USAF strives to recruit. The basis of my analysis is a derivative of the US Air Force Culture and Language Center's (AFCLC) twelve domains of culture. While the AFCLC's mission "supports the Expeditionary Air Force by providing Airmen at all ranks with

⁴ Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, *When Generations Collide* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 43.

⁵ James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers* (Washington DC, Potomac Books, Inc., 1995), p. 210-211.

the best available understanding of foreign cultures and the competencies to communicate and collaborate effectively with members of foreign societies,”⁶ I believe use of a parallel analogy can be effective to infuse *generational* cultural awareness into our recruiting efforts within the USAF.

After examining the characteristics of the three generations using a domain-based schema, I conclude with recommendations on how AFRS can continue to improve recruiting by integrating generational culture training into their organization and business processes with the goal of multiple generations synergistically working together to market to and recruit the top candidates into the USAF enlisted force.

⁶ AFCLC, “Mission Statement,” 1.

Background & Problem Description

Snapshot of Enlisted Recruiting

Many commanders have used the phrase, “mission first, people always” knowing that without talented and motivated airmen even the most sophisticated weapon system would be rendered useless. AFRS recruits the enlisted force which makes up approximately 80% of the entire USAF (current end strength is 260,000 enlisted and 65,000 officers) and keeps the force structure aligned with congressional authorizations.⁷ The AFRS mission is to “recruit quality airmen from a cross-section of America responsive to the ever-changing needs of the Air Force” and to use “all the tools of the professional salesmanship to achieve the primary objective—air superiority.”⁸

To accomplish the mission of recruiting the fiscal year 2008 goal of 27,800 enlisted troops per year, AFRS has a team of 2,540 active duty and 307 civilians, to include 1,114 enlisted recruiters scattered around the nation in over 1200 offices.⁹ [Note: AFRS also conducts Officer Training School and professional (medical, dental, chaplain) recruiting with fiscal year 2008 goals of 435 and 1300, respectively.]¹⁰ AFRS headquarters is at Randolph AFB, TX and AFRS acts as a wing-equivalent (commander is a brigadier general) under Air Education and Training Command. The nation is divided in four sections with each of the designated groups assigned roughly the same target audience population. Each group, led by a colonel, has seven squadrons, which are comprised of 100-110 personnel and commanded by a major or lieutenant colonel.

⁷ “People,” Air Force Magazine, Vol. 91, No. 5 (May 2008): 49.

⁸ USAF Fact Sheet: Air Force Recruiting Service, 1.

⁹ Ibid, 1.

¹⁰ Ibid, 1.

Training for the AFRS recruiting team varies tremendously. Senior leaders join the team from selection off a command list for this special duty assignment; most have no prior knowledge of recruiting. Senior leaders attend a one-week command course that familiarizes them with the mission and common pitfalls to commanding in a recruiting squadron/group. By direct contrast, the enlisted airmen go through a very robust screening and training regimen. Screening consists of a series of interviews and quality checks to ensure the applicants exceed all standards (dress and appearance, fitness, discipline, etc). Seasoned recruiters brief applicants about the stress of monthly goals, the long and uncertain work hours, and the challenges of working in an autonomous work environment. Once selected for this special duty career field, recruiters go to a top-notch and nationally recognized seven-week recruiter course to learn the art of selling and the fundamentals of the AF recruiting process. Training includes sales and speech fundamentals, AF eligibility requirements, marketing, applicant processing, telephone techniques, and software/administrative skills.¹¹ After completion of this course, recruiters report to their squadron and receive two months of additional on-the-job training before assignment of a monthly goal.

Training for the new recruiters is conducted by flight chiefs and other squadron senior enlisted airmen; many who started out in recruiting as junior non-commissioned officers and remained in the special duty career field. Their guidance and leadership is critical to the commanders and new enlisted accession recruiters. Once all initial training is complete, the recruiter gets his/her own office, a laptop computer and a government car to begin the, some say, never-ending journey of making goal.

¹¹ US Air Force Fact Sheet. "Becoming a Recruiter," 1.

Analysis

Understanding a different culture takes place at three progressive levels: surface (knowing the basic characteristics), middle (exploring social norms and symbols) and deep (truly understanding beliefs to include values, emotions and underlying assumptions).¹² Most Americans understand the generation born before and after their own at the surface or middle level, meaning they have not spent much time delving into why the other generations think and act as they do. The power of generational cultural training is beginning to pay dividends in corporate America as "...the newest and hottest form of diversity on the business scene today."¹³ Companies across the nation are realizing "how many major business issues, like recruiting, retaining, managing and motivating employees are directly affected by generational collisions."¹⁴

Generational collisions result from ethnocentrism, or the judging of others beliefs and actions against your own. This type of perception will limit one's ability to understand others and can lead to judging another generation as inferior.¹⁵ In an effort to compare and contrast the three generations involved in AF enlisted recruiting, I created six domains of generational culture awareness (Table 1). The following generational analysis will use this criterion to expose the deep generational beliefs and to provide insight into what motivates and appeals to them.

¹² AFCLC, "Mission Statement," 1.

¹³ Lancaster and Stillman, *When Generations Collide*, xxiv.

¹⁴ Ibid., xxiv.

¹⁵ AFCLC, "Mission Statement," 1.

Table 1

Domains of Generational Culture

Six broad categories responsible for each generation deriving their cultural behavior and beliefs

1. **Set Point:** describes the environment as the generation grew up to include various aspects such as economy, parental views/actions, and societal issues
 2. **Critical innovation:** the invention that permanently and universally impacted the young generation and their outlook toward the future
 3. **Power influences: People, Places and Things:** national/international people, places and things that shaped the generation attitudes and beliefs
 4. **Mindset developed:** how the generation as a whole assimilated various aspects of youth into a basis of belief
 5. **Natural bias:** overall generation outlook and common traits that support their adult behavior and beliefs
 6. **Workplace ethos/career goals:** the response of the generation (output) in the work place—what they expect and what their career goals tend to be
-

Generational analysis provides an overarching culture for a group of people born within a 15-20 year period. Those born on the edges of the assumed generational boundaries may exhibit characteristics of multiple generations. As with any mass labeling of a population, anomalies do occur. However, this study is relevant to enhance our understanding of multiple generations and how they came about developing the beliefs and attitudes displayed by the majority.

Of the major generational studies theorists, the exact boundary between generations can vary by a couple of years. For purposes of this study, I use the Lancaster and Stillman standard of 1946-1964 to characterize the Baby Boomer generation and those born between 1965 and 1980 to represent Generation X. Remaining is the target audience our USAF recruiters seek to hire: the Millennial generation born from 1981-1999.¹⁶ Table 2 is a preview of the major generational differences discussed in the following section.

¹⁶ Lancaster and Stillman, “*When Generations Collide*,” 20, 24, 27.

Table 2: Comparison of Three Generations
Senior Leaders (Baby Boomers), Recruiters (Gen Xers), Young Americans (Millennials)¹⁷

	Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
Length of generation	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-1999
Population Size	80 million (huge)	46 million (small)	76 million
Set point (growing up environment, economy, parental views, societal issues)	Booming economy, promise of good education, parents' dream children will do better	No real heroes (all getting in trouble); divorce rate tripled; cocaine, AIDS, child molesters, drunk drivers; mom's worked	Raised by high communicative, participation-oriented parents; included in major family decisions; used to sticking up for themselves; "overprogrammed" childhood activities
Critical innovation	TV	Personal Computer	Portable Technology
Powerful Influences: People	MLK, Nixon, JFK, Cleavers, Rosa Parks, Osmonds, Beatles, Partridge family	Clinton/Lewinsky, Bundy, Clarence Thomas, OJ, Dilbert, Dennis Rodman, supermodels, Madonna, and Michael Jordan	Barney, Britney, Backstreet Boys, Sammy Sosa, Venus and Serena Williams
Powerful Influences: Places	Watergate, Hanoi, Kent State, Woodstock, suburbs, boardroom, divorce ct	USSR, Somalia, Chernobyl, Lockerbie (Scotland), Starbucks, Intl Space Station, and Internet	Chat rooms, cyberspace, outer space, Columbine HS
Powerful Influences: Things	Bell bottoms, mood rings, Rolex watches, junk food, LSD	Explosion of 24 hr media, cell phones, cable/digital/satellite TV, microwaves	Info superhighway, information overload, gang violence
Mindset developed	Questioned parents ideals (protested status quo in civil rights, women's rights, birth control); convinced they can fix societal issues	Distrust of permanence of institutional and personal relationships; the world isn't safe; no loyalty to company—switch careers often	Appreciation for diversity; want workplace safety; have some loyalty to institutions; some optimism to make things happen although some skepticism as well
Natural bias: Overall outlook	Optimistic/Idealist (Depression is over)	Skeptical (every American institution questioned)	Empowered (take action when things go wrong)
Natural bias: Common traits	Competitive: large numbers of boomers competed for best college, jobs, etc.	Extremely resourceful and independent (self-starter); counted on friends and not institutions to shield from reality	Smart, practical, multi-task oriented, confident, techno-savvy –the next great generation?
Workplace ethos	Shake it up management style; "change of command" vs. "chain of command" of previous generation	"Show me the money"; inventors and entrepreneurs; ("self-command"); create own career path	"Don't command, collaborate"; fun at work; power of each individual to make a difference
Career goals	"Build a stellar career"	"Build a portable career"	"Build parallel careers"

¹⁷ Lancaster and Stillman, "When Generations Collide," 20-32, 55.

Strategic Leaders in AFRS—Baby Boomers

First, I will dissect the Baby Boomer Generation that encompasses the senior leaders and strategic decision makers, primarily the AFRS commander plus senior staff and group commanders, within AFRS. These leaders are responsible for the strategic vision of the organization to include executing a \$20M marketing budget, approving the national advertising strategy, developing and completing of recruiter training, and ultimately ensuring the command meets the enlisted recruiting needs of the USAF¹⁸.

Born in the years following two major crises for America, the Great Depression and World War II, this generation of leaders is bursting with peers—80 million babies were born between 1946 and 1964.¹⁹

Set Point: Most Baby Boomers grew up in a nuclear family with the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the one who stayed home to raise the children (only 2% of toddlers attended an institutional daycare).²⁰ With the emergence of the fear of communism spreading throughout the world, most parents chose to raise their Boomer children following the Dr. Spock prescribed method, one which mixed science with a coaxing and a permissive flavor rather than the strict authoritarian method their parents used (which some parents believed resulted in children tending toward communism).²¹ Times were good post-war: the economy was booming, vaccines for major diseases were available (diphtheria and polio), GI loans were readily available and the promise of education for all emerged. Boomers' parents wanted to give their children all the opportunities they had only dreamed of and provided encouragement to

¹⁸ D'Andrea, memorandum.

¹⁹ Lancaster and Stillman, "When Generations Collide," 20.

²⁰ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1585 to 2069* (New York, NY, Morrow & Co., 1991), 304.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 308.

their kids to chase those dreams.²² Most Boomer middle and upper class children were sheltered from the unpleasantness of other parts of society, that of poverty, crime, and disease but soon that would all change.²³

Critical Invention: No question the invention and availability of television radically changed this generation from the previous radio-only generation. In 1952, there were only 4 million television sets in America; however, the number exploded to 50 million by 1960.²⁴ “Experiencing landmark events either live or through the miracle of television, permanently changed the Boomers.”²⁵

Powerful influences: People. Television opened up the world in way which radio could not and many of the powerful influences that shaped the Boomers values came from those they gathered through the television. Injustices surrounding Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, the ups and downs of the Nixon and JF Kennedy presidencies, and stories of ideal families (the Cleaver’s and Partridge’s) entered Americans’ living rooms nightly. The Osmond’s and Beatles captivated music of the Boomer’s youth.

Powerful influences: Places. While “Leave it to Beaver” cast the American life as near perfect, television opened up the nation to the reality of what was happening in America and abroad. Footage from Vietnam (with frequent enemy body counts) along with the Watergate scandal and the anti-war riot at Kent State proved to Boomers the nation was veering off-course. Other influences of the 1960’s were Woodstock (and free love), the sexual revolution (especially

²² Lancaster and Stillman, “*When Generations Collide*,” 22.

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ Ibid., 21.

for women), the development of subdivisions, corporate boardrooms and the beginnings of divorce court.²⁶

Powerful influences: Things. With a booming economy, the American consumer had a plethora of new things to purchase. New on the scene in the 1950's and 1960's were items such as bell bottom pants, mood rings, Rolex watches, junk food and the drug LSD.²⁷

Mindset developed: Boomers assimilated the various aspects of their youth and developed a vision that the world could be better place and they were the ones who could right societal issues. They questioned their parents' beliefs surrounding "civil rights, women's rights, reproductive rights, and even the rights of Mother Earth, giving birth to the ecology movement".²⁸

Natural bias: The Baby Boomer generation overall is optimistic and idealist. A generation that largely had an affluent and protected childhood developed a confidence to change things to make them even better. The Boomer generation is also highly competitive—with over 80 million in its population; Boomers competed for everything from playing varsity athletics in high school to admittance into college to competing for their first job.²⁹ "Boomers, while graced with many blessings and privileges, have had to fight for much of what they've achieved in corporate America against the sheer number of peers competing for the same jobs and promotions."³⁰

Workplace ethos/career goals: With optimism and education, the Boomers entered the workforce with a shake-it-up mentality. They disdained the previous generation's reliance on a

²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²⁷ Ibid., 22.

²⁸ Ibid., 24.

²⁹ Ibid., 24.

³⁰ Ibid., 22.

chain of command and instead used a “change of command” mantra.³¹ Boomers, who grew up in a somewhat coddled fashion under the Dr. Spock teachings, focused organizations on a more interpersonal level--shunning the previous generations’ traditional need-to-know style.³² A Baby Boomer’s career goal was to be hired by a good company, work hard up the career ladder, and retire from that same organization decades later.

³¹ Ibid., 22.

³² Ibid., 24.

Operational and Tactical Leaders in AFRS—Generation X

The second generation represented in the recruiting equation is the operational and tactical leaders—those who are directly responsible for making the enlisted accession goal. Generation X'ers differ dramatically from the Baby Boomers and as we will see, are just as remarkably different from the Millennial generation that their mission success depends on. These leaders are responsible for running the 28 squadrons across the country and consist of mostly field grade/company officers and mid-grade to senior enlisted airmen. The recruiters, who directly interface with Millennials as they attempt to recruit them into the enlisted force, are Generation Xers. The average recruiter age is 30, their rank is Staff Sergeant, and they have been in the USAF for 10 years.³³ Born in the years following Woodstock and free expression, this generation is small with only 46 million X'ers born between 1965 and 1985.³⁴

Set Point: Contrary to the safe and nurturing environment of the Baby Boomers, the Generation X'ers experienced somewhat of an “unwanted” and uncertain childhood. Birth control pills and abortions kept the birth rate down while the divorce rate in American soared. “As the 1960's wore on, [parents] increasingly looked on their children as hindrances to self-exploration...adults ranked autos ahead of children as necessary for the good life...”³⁵ As families split up, instability soared...more women went to work, it was tougher to make ends meet, kids split time between parents and many X'ers became latch key kids after school. “The media reinforced the growing view among children that adults were not especially virtuous, competent or powerful...[X'ers] were deliberately encouraged to react to life as you would hack through a jungle: Keep your eyes open, expect the worst, and handle it on your own.”³⁶ Signs of

³³ D'Andrea, memorandum.

³⁴ Lancaster and Stillman, “*When Generations Collide*,” 24.

³⁵ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 328.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 329.

a deteriorating and unsafe society constantly bombarded latchkey kids through the media as missing children ad showed up on milk cartons and the rise and consequences of AIDS, cocaine use and drunk driving appeared on television.³⁷

Critical Invention: The personal computer distinctly changed this generation's way of life. Generation Xers were the first generation to use computers instead of typewriters in college. When this generation joined the work force, there was a computer on every desk with email and internet access drastically changing workplace protocol.

Powerful influences: People. Headline grabbers during the Xers' formative years included: President Clinton, Monica Lewinsky, Ted Bundy, OJ Simpson, Clarence Thomas, Dilbert, Dennis Rodman, various supermodels, Madonna and Michael Jordan.³⁸ With the exception of Michael Jordan, most influential people in the Xers' youth made news not for their valor or heroic acts, but for their rebellious actions or immoral behavior.

Powerful influences: Things. Inventions, especially in media, bombarded the Generation Xers' world. The explosion of 24-hour media and tabloid journalism coupled with "new" ways to get television (cable, digital, satellite) marked a turn in society.³⁹ The expectation that worldwide news would be available moments after an event occurred replaced the "wait for the six o'clock news" Baby Boomer mentality. Other major inventions included the microwave oven and the emergence of cell phones.

Powerful influences: Places. Dynamic media advancements made the world seem to be a smaller place. Significant world events during the Xers rise included the collapse of the USSR, military action in the failed state of Somalia, terrorist events in Scotland and the development of

³⁷ Ibid., 329.

³⁸ Lancaster and Stillman, "*When Generations Collide*," 24.

³⁹ Ibid., 25.

the International Space Station. Domestically, Starbucks began its proliferation across the country enticing many Generation Xers to start their day with a cup of gourmet coffee.

Mindset developed: Generation Xers “grew up seeing every major American institution called into question. From the presidency to the military to organized religion to corporate America, you name the institution and the Xers can name the crime.”⁴⁰ In addition, the divorce rate tripled during the 1970’s causing further distrust in institutions and relationships.⁴¹ “As a result, Xers tend to put more faith in themselves as individuals and less faith in the institutions that seem to have failed them time and again.”⁴²

Natural bias: Generation X overall is skeptical. To overcome their distrust of institutions and personal relationships, Gen Xers are extremely resourceful and independent; true self-starters.⁴³

Workplace ethos/career goals: The distinguishing feature from the Baby Boomer is the Generation X lack of loyalty to a company. Generations Xers change jobs frequently with the mindset “show me the money”. This generation produced a higher than average percentage of inventors and entrepreneurs but also yielded people taking charge of their own career development, switching employers often so they can meet their monetary or professional development goals.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., 25.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴² Ibid., 25.

⁴³ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

Target Market for AFRS—Millennial Generation

The third, and perhaps most important, part of the enlisted recruiting equation is the Millennial generation and understanding their culture so recruiters can effectively and efficiently target eligible candidates. Eligible candidates are in limited supply as 73% of American youth are not qualified for military service (55% are disqualified for weight, medical, moral and dependent reasons; 44% are disqualified for education and aptitude reasons).⁴⁵ Another challenge recruiters face is patriotism, while still higher than pre-Sep 11, 2001, has steadily decreased since 2002.⁴⁶ Millennials, numbering around 76 million and born between 1981 and 1999, have different values and ideals from the Generation Xers' who work so hard to recruit them.

Set Point: By the 1980's, the laissez-faire attitude toward raising children of the 1960's evaporated. Children born in the 1980's and 1990's were indeed "wanted". Baby Boomer and early Xer parents had smaller families and later in life—only 2% of kids lived in families with five or more children.⁴⁷ Abortion rates declined and infertility treatment and pre-mature infant care became two of the fastest growing medical fields.⁴⁸ Divorce rates slowly started to fall, the economy expanded, society increased pressure on public education accountability, professional day cares vied for doting parents, and parents stressed the role of duty to children.⁴⁹ Parents strived to give their kids the perfect life—academic daycares, scheduling sports and music lessons and giving children a voice in their decisions—all prior to elementary school. Raised in

⁴⁵ D'Andrea, memorandum.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁷ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 341.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 342.

⁴⁹ Col Phillip Parker, "Rotaract/Interact" (lecture, Mobile, AL, June 2005).

this highly communicative and participation-oriented environment, Millennials from a young age are accustomed to sticking up for their ideas and articulating their point of view.⁵⁰

Critical Invention: The greatest innovation during the Millennials' formative years is the portability of technology and communication. No longer does it matter where you are physically located—Millennials grew up always knowing they can access information and communicate with a device that fits in their pocket. They text, surf the web for news and entertainment, email, listen to music, and instant message all on the device that was initially designed to solely provide mobile telephone capability. Millennials feel lost, uninformed and out of touch if they don't have their "phone" with them at all times!

Powerful influences: People. "With technology blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, the people influencing Millennials often seemed larger than life."⁵¹ Prince William, Barney, Dora the Explorer, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Backstreet Boys, Sammy Sosa and Venus and Serena Williams have influenced the young lives of the Millennials.

Powerful influences: Things. Technology became more powerful, smaller and accessible to most Americans. Millennials grew up with a cell phone, game boy, iPod, and Wii. They use the information superhighway while watching television and chatting on the phone; multi-tasking is their forté. Social networking sites allow them to post, what once was considered private information, out to the world. They have "friends" on "My Space" and "Face Book" they have never even met. They watch self-created, personally uploaded videos on "YouTube" of people they do not know, instant message their pals, visit chat rooms, and blog to make their opinion available to the world. They grew up with reality television, where people

⁵⁰ Lancaster and Stillman, "*When Generations Collide*," 28.

⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

work in teams to vote off a player. They are not offended (and expect) to see shows about sexual/bisexual/homosexual activity.

Powerful influences: Places. New frontiers for Millennials include cyberspace and outer space. Despite the forward progress and promises that technology delivers, the Millennials remember the tragedies that occurred at during the mass school shootings at Columbine High School and Virginal Technical University, as well as, September 11, 2001, when foreign terrorists attacked the Twin Towers in New York City.

Mindset developed: Millennials are strong and independent young people with a sense of autonomy. They feel safe in expressing their opinions, they are innovative and inquisitive, and they have an insatiable appetite for instant gratification (immediacy).⁵² Millennials did not carry the racial and gender biases forward from their ancestors—they expect a diverse environment. Perhaps fallout from current events, Millennials also expect a work place to guarantee a certain level of physical security. Millennials bring the optimism from the Baby Boomers tempered with the skepticism of Generation Xers to maintain neutral or practical mindset when approaching problems.⁵³

Natural bias: Empowered Millennials will take action when things go wrong. “Millennials also have the benefit of the wisdom of each generation that has gone before, prompting Strauss and Howe to predict that they will truly be the next “Greatest Generation.”⁵⁴ They are smart, practical, multi-task oriented, confident, and techno savvy—the right mix for success. “...Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are

⁵² Parker, “Rotaract/Interact”.

⁵³ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 4.

⁵⁴ Lancaster and Stillman, “*When Generations Collide*,” 29.

beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits...a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty and good conduct.”⁵⁵

Workplace ethos/career goals: Millennials excel when collaborating to solve problems and like knowing they are part of something worthwhile. They recognize the power of each individual to make a difference. Millennials want to have fun at work—it makes them feel like it is more than a job. Most will not work for an organization long as the Millennial trend is to build parallel careers by focusing on building a resume with multiple job skills and experience. “Futurists predict that Millennials will experience as many as ten career changes in their lifetimes. That’s *career* changes, not *job* changes—meaning they will recycle their skills and talents and personal preferences into new applications again and again and again.”⁵⁶ Recruiting the Millennial generation, especially young adults, also depends on winning parental buy-in. Boomer parents played an active role as their children were growing up and still are very influential in helping their children decide what to do.⁵⁷ Rewarding work for Millennials include being engaged in a job that has meaning and working in a “fun environment, having the ability to work in teams with peers, having bosses they can relate to and being allowed to participate in work decisions.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 4.

⁵⁶ Lancaster and Stillman, “*When Generations Collide*,” 66.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Our nation recently embraced the strategic, operational and tactical benefits of adding the cultural dimension as one of our instruments of power, as well as implementing cultural training within our military and state department employees who routinely work in foreign lands. My recommendation is the Air Force adapts the same vigor in infusing generational cultural training in its operations—beginning with Air Force Recruiting Service.

To do this, I propose a three-prong approach: internalizing the benefits of generational cultural training throughout the command, training senior leaders and strategic partners, and ensuring we have the right mix of recruiters with current, relevant and actionable training.

First, AFRS leadership needs to explore and internalize the benefits of generational cultural training. Recruiting in the military directly correlates to recruiting in the business world. If we want to compete successfully, we have to use all the advantages our competitors do. I recommend hiring a consultant firm to educate leaders on the advantage of generational cultural training and dedicate resources within the command to fund on-going training and education.

Second, train all AFRS leaders (to include group and squadron level leaders) and strategic partners (contracted marketing firms and Air Staff public affairs, marketing, and personnel) so they understand and embrace the value of generational awareness concepts and are committed to adjusting business operations to maximize the benefits. Marketing needs to be a “persuasive statement of what you have to offer aimed at appealing to a particular generation of recruits that is focused on the audience; not on the organization.”⁵⁹ To make this training an on-going and robust in addition to current sales techniques, buy-in and funding is required at all levels.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 164.

Finally, get the training and implementation of new practices out to the field. Flight chiefs responsible for screening potential new recruiters need to add another dimension in the hiring criteria to ensure the potential new-hire can work with Millennials. “Your company may have written the best interview questions in the world, but if the wrong people are asking them, it won’t make a difference. More and more, achieving the right match between recruiter and recruitee is a delicate balance...organizations need to choose recruiters who have the ability to establish rapport with whomever they are trying to recruit, regardless of generation. Know the generation and what’s important to them.”⁶⁰

Once the right recruiters are hired, the next step is to make sure training is actionable. By including generational awareness practices into recruiting, we can save resources:

“When we ask employers what they do when they fail to meet their recruiting quotas, they tell us they typically redouble their efforts. They place more ads, interview more candidates. That’s as ridiculous as the old fallacy of the best way to look for your lost keys. When people lose keys, they search frantically in all the usual places...when those options have been exhausted, what do they do? They go search all those places again!...Its a colossal waste of effort. The same holds true for recruiting. If looking in all the usual places isn’t getting you what you want, then redoubling your efforts is a waste of time and money...We need to look in a different way, in different places, or we’re never going to find them.”⁶¹

In order to shift the paradigm of looking in the same places, we need to enhance our standard recruiting practices to include looking for ‘keys’ in different places. By integrating generational cultural training coursework in the curriculum at recruiting school and continuing education during quarterly sales training meetings we can introduce new tactics to incorporate into day-to-day operations. “Becoming a “recruiting revolutionary” means taking time to analyze whether your recruiting process will actually build a generational bridge or just widens the gap.”⁶² In an environment where every “key” is important, it is worth AFRS’ upfront expenditures in this

⁶⁰ Ibid., 182.

⁶¹ Ibid., 161.

⁶² Ibid., 161.

training and tactics arena to save resources and maximize recruiting potential of the 1,100+ USAF recruiters hiring our enlisted force.

Due to changing USAF end strength requirements, the Fiscal Year 2009 enlisted recruiting goal surges 15% to hiring 31,780 tech savvy, innovative, morally sound and physically fit young Americans.⁶³ With minimal change in the recruiter force, we need to embrace the AF Smart Operations for the 21st Century concept and help our recruiters increase their productivity efficiently. Generational awareness training does just that—it allows recruiters to work smarter, recruit more cost effectively and by using tactics and techniques aimed specifically at the Millennial generations’ values and ideals match our “corporation’s” needs with quality applicants.

In this paper I examined the challenges facing AFRS by looking at the enlisted accession mission, AFRS organization and the current training programs. Next, I explored the differences in values and beliefs between the three generations, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials, interacting in the recruiting process. I covered the importance of understanding and capitalizing on truly connecting with the target audience, as well as being mindful of your own generational biases. Finally, I set forth some recommendations for AFRS to incorporate generational awareness training and tactics into its daily business. Other successful businesses have discovered generational cultural training “is an opportunity, a tool in the arsenal that [we] can turn into a competitive advantage.”⁶⁴ Now’s the time for AFRS to embrace this concept and use generational knowledge as a force multiplier in the recruiting business.

⁶³ D’Andrea, memorandum.

⁶⁴ Lancaster and Stillman, “*When Generations Collide*,” 9.

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